

THE NECESSITY OF REGENERATION

NO. 3121

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1908
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 29, 1874

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”
John 3:7

[See sermon #130, Regeneration]

WE need not wonder that there are some mysteries in our holy faith, for there are mysteries everywhere. In nature there are ten thousand things that we cannot understand. In our own bodies there are inexplicable mysteries. He who thinks for only a little while, even of so simple a matter as to how it is that food is gradually turned into flesh, knowing how impossible it would be for us to do it by any chemical process or mechanical apparatus, will see that there is a mystery in every human life, a secret chamber into which the eyes of man cannot look.

There are mysteries all around us at this very moment. If we go outside this building, we shall, like Nicodemus, observe that the wind blows, we know it blows, for we hear the sound thereof, but as to whence it comes, or whither it goes, we know nothing. As there are mysteries in nature, as there are mysteries in our own bodies, as there are mysteries all around us even in the most commonplace things, it is not remarkable that there should be mysteries in the kingdom of God.

Yet Christ, by using the metaphor of the wind, shows us that the mystery is a matter of fact, and that the mystery can be turned to practical account, for though we do not understand all about the wind, yet we know when it is blowing, and though we cannot comprehend it, we can make use of it. The wind has been employed in a thousand ways in the service of man, and it is not necessary that we should understand it in order to make use of it.

A man may be an admirable sailor and yet know nothing about the origin of the wind. If he does but understand how to hoist, or shift, or furl his sail, he will do well enough. So is it with the mysteries of the kingdom of God, although we cannot understand them, the practical use of them is a matter of such simplicity that we shall do well to learn what it is.

I am not going to attempt to explain the mystery of the new birth, that is altogether beyond my powers, I can only explain its results. But there is one point upon which I want to fix your attention, and that is that if you are ever to be saved, you must experience this new birth. “Must is for the king,” we say, and it was the King of kings who said, “Ye must be born again.” My text belongs to the absolute necessities, this is a truth that cannot be put aside, “Ye must be born again.” If you are ever to enter the kingdom of God, or even to see it, if you are ever to be reconciled to the God whom you have so greatly offended, “Ye must be born again.”

But what is it to be born again? I have already said that I cannot tell you how the Spirit of God operates upon the unregenerate, making them to be new creatures in Christ Jesus. I know that He usually operates through the Word, through the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel. So far as we know, He works upon the mind according to the laws of mind by first illuminating the understanding, He then controls the judgment, influences the will, and changes the affections, but over and above all that we can describe there is a marvelous power which He exerts, which must remain amongst the inscrutable mysteries of this finite state, even if we can ever comprehend it.

By this power such a wondrous effect is produced that a man becomes a new man as much as if he had returned to his native nothingness, and had been born again in an altogether higher sphere. A new nature is created within him, although the old nature is not entirely eradicated. It will ultimately be destroyed, but it is not destroyed at first, yet a new nature is born within the man, a nature which hates what the old nature loved, and loves what the old nature hated, a new nature which is akin to the nature of God. That is a wonderful sentence in Peter's second epistle, "that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." In his first epistle, he writes concerning "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."

This living seed is sown within our hearts, and there it begins to grow, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The new birth is the implanting of that living seed within the soul, it is the creation within us of that new, divine, immortal life. We must have that life or we cannot see or enter the kingdom of God.

My subject is the imperative necessity of regeneration, and I want to show you, first, that *the new birth is a great necessity*, and secondly, to ask, *have we all experienced it?*

I. First then, I want to show you that THE NEW BIRTH IS A GREAT NECESSITY.

That it is a necessity is quite certain, *because it is Jesus Himself who says, "Ye must be born again,"* and Jesus cannot err. Unless we are prepared to reject Him altogether, we must believe Him to be the infallible Teacher sent from God, yet He says, "Ye *must* be born again," and you may depend upon it that you *must* if you are ever to be saved.

He was of a gentle, loving spirit, He never bound heavy burdens upon men's shoulders which they were not able to bear. He was so gentle that the little children gathered around His knees, and He took them up in His arms and blessed them. I am sure that if He could have said, "You can enter the kingdom of heaven without experiencing the new birth," He would have said so. He said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life," because He must speak the truth.

In other places, how blessedly has He set the gate of mercy wide open, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink," and His last Gospel invitation is, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The words of our text become all the more solemn because they drop from the lips of Him who would not exclude a single soul from everlasting happiness unless truth required Him to do so. It is the tender, gentle, loving Christ who says, "Ye must be born again," and so shuts and bars the gate of heaven against the admission of the unregenerate.

The necessity of regeneration is universal, for Christ addressed this message to a man who was the type of a class of persons who might be exempted from the new birth if any might. It was Nicodemus, a man who sincerely wished to know the truth, and who was truly desirous to be informed as to the way of salvation. He came to Christ, not with any traitorous design of catching Him in His speech, but keenly desirous to learn what the God-sent Teacher had to tell him. Yet Nicodemus could not enter the kingdom of God until he was born again, nor can the most earnest inquirer nor the keenest searcher after truth.

It is an excellent thing to have an honest heart and a candid mind, but Christ says even to such men, "Ye must be born again." I delight to meet with honest minded persons even if they are opposed to the Gospel, for I have often found that their honesty compels them to yield to the claims of the Gospel when it is faithfully set before them.

Several of the first followers of Christ were plain, blunt fishermen, honest after their fashion, yet they had to be born again, and it does not matter how good a man may be, or how earnest he may be in seeking to find the truth, he cannot escape from the necessity which applies to the entire human race, "Ye must be born again."

Moreover, Nicodemus was a wise man, well taught in the Scriptures. To be a Rabbi required a thorough education in the Old Testament Scriptures, and doubtless Nicodemus was equal to the rest of the Sanhedrim to which he belonged, but the study of Scripture, admirable as that is, will not save the soul without the new birth. It is not merely reading about Christ, but having Christ formed in us, the hope of glory, that will really save us. The Spirit of God has written the Scriptures in this blessed Book,

but that same Spirit must write those truths in our heart, or else the truths will, so far as salvation is concerned, be valueless to us. No amount of knowledge that you can acquire, even a doctor's degree of divinity—no amount of skill in imparting knowledge to others, even though you should be a master in Israel—will enable you to enter heaven without being born again.

Moreover, in addition to being a wise man, and a naturally good man, Nicodemus was a very religious man. He was “a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews.” The Pharisees were very specially a religious sect, they pushed their observances to the extreme point, and all the minutiae of external ritual were carefully attended to by them. They were great believers in fasting, in almsgiving, and in oft-repeated prayers. They were the High Churchmen of that period, yet to the most conscientious Pharisees Christ had to say, “Ye must be born again.”

The Pharisee might be particular as to the tithing of mint and anise and cumin, and the straining out of gnats from the wine that he drank, or he might abstain from it altogether, but all this availed him nothing unless he was born again. Regeneration is the universal necessity of the entire human family. This text would suit a congregation of kings, and princes, peers of the realm and bishops, quite as well as a congregation of costermongers, drunkards, harlots, and jailbirds. To all of woman born this necessity comes without a single exception, “Ye must be born again.”

This necessity is evident if we consult the authority of Scripture. Consider its testimony conceiving what man is by nature. The Word of God never flatters us. It tells us that “there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.” “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

Now, if this is your ruined condition, “ye must be born again” if you are ever to enter the kingdom of God. Mending you, patching you up, revising you, reforming you, will be of no avail, you must be new-created, nothing less than that will suffice for you.

*“Not all the outward forms on earth,
Nor rites that God has given,
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,
Can raise a soul to heaven.*

*The sovereign will of God alone
Creates us heirs of grace;
Born in the image of His Son,
A new peculiar race.”*

Remember also what even the Gospel requires of men. Men can hear the Gospel, for they have ears, but they cannot understand it until the Spirit of God opens their minds and hearts to receive it. Unto this day it happens unto men as unto the generation in Christ's day that though they have ears, they hear not, and though we speak unto them, they do not perceive, for how shall the fleshly man receive spiritual things? The unregenerate heart can no more understand the Gospel than a horse can understand astronomy, it is altogether beyond the comprehension of the carnal man.

When we use a simple metaphor, he takes it as literally as Nicodemus did when the Lord said to him, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” and he foolishly asked, “Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?” When Christ talked to the woman at the well of Sychar about the living water, she said at once, “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.”

And today, when Christ says concerning the bread at the communion, “Take, eat, this is my body,” the carnally minded say that the bread is turned into flesh, not having the spiritual discernment to be able

to comprehend even the simplest metaphors which the Lord Jesus Christ is pleased to use. Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, and therefore the carnal mind cannot discern them.

The graces which appear at the very dawn of the Gospel in the heart are wholly above the reach of man. The Gospel says, “Repent.” The unregenerate man loves his sins, and will not repent of them. He presses them to his bosom, and until his nature is changed, he will never look upon them with abhorrence and sorrow. The Gospel says, “Believe; cast away all confidence in your own merits, and believe in Jesus.” But the carnal mind is proud and it says, “Why should I believe, and be saved by the works of another? I want to do something myself that I may have some of the credit for it, either by good feelings, or good prayers, or good works of some kind.”

Repentance and faith are distasteful to the unregenerate, they would sooner repeat a thousand formal prayers than shed a solitary tear of true repentance. They would sooner work their way to heaven even if they had to pass through hell itself to get there, than come and simply receive salvation for nothing as the gift of God by Jesus Christ. Brethren, we must be born again because the truth of the Gospel cannot be understood, and the commands of the Gospel cannot be obeyed, except where the Spirit of God works regeneration in the heart.

As for *the privileges of the Gospel*, such as communion with Christ, what does the unregenerate man care about that? Access to God, acceptance in the Beloved, adoption into the family of God—he knows nothing about these things, and does not want to know about them. Give him prosperity in his business, and happiness in his household, and he is perfectly satisfied without the treasures of the covenant of grace, or a saving interest in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may call him to the Gospel feast, but he will not come, for he sees nothing to come for. You may invite him, as you ought to do, but he will say, “I must go to my farm to try my new yoke of oxen,” or “I must go to my newly wedded wife, so I pray thee have me excused.” He will do anything rather than come to the banquet which eternal love has spread, because, until he is regenerated, he cannot appreciate the privileges which the Gospel presents to him.

And brethren, “ye must be born again,” *because it is impossible for you to ever enter heaven unregenerate*. On earth you cannot have peace with God without the new birth. God will never be reconciled to the flesh. It is a filthy thing which must be put away. The old nature must be dead and buried. The ordinance of believers’ baptism is meant to teach us that great truth. It is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, that was done by circumcision, but in the new covenant, it is the burial of the flesh altogether. It must be reckoned to be dead and buried with Christ, and so be put right away once for all.

Oh, that the Holy Spirit would work this with each one of us! “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” and that which, in our mental nature, is called the flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God. It must die, and be utterly put away as a corrupt thing, and we can only enter heaven through the possession of the heavenly life, by virtue of having been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. Do you, dear friends, know experientially what this means?

I have to make this further observation, that *this necessity is not to be escaped anyhow*. You may do what you will, my dear hearer, and I trust you will be in real earnest in seeking the salvation of your soul, but when you have done your best and your utmost, you must be born again. Were you from this time to give yourself diligently to searching the Scriptures, you must be born again. Did you ever notice the very strong light in which Christ put that matter of searching the Scriptures? Read aright, the text says, “Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me: but ye will not come unto me that you might have life.”

Many a Bible reader is content with his Bible reading, but never comes to Christ, yet Bible searching alone will not suffice for salvation, “Ye must be born again.” If you were to become, from this time, regular in private devotion, and constant in attendance upon public ordinances, still would this declaration stand, “Ye must be born again.” If you are to be saved, you must have a new heart and a right spirit, and these you cannot get for yourself. A tree may shoot out a new branch, but it cannot

change its nature. “Ye must be born again, born from above,” so our Savior tells us. There must be wrought in you a work which is impossible to you, a work which only God, the Holy Ghost Himself can perform, or else you cannot see the face of God with acceptance.

Ay, and in addition to anything that you can do, ministers may do all that they can do for you, but they cannot take you to heaven, nor make you God’s child, you must be born again. I thank God for any revival that produces any genuine results, but just because I rejoice in revivals of the right kind, I tremble as I think of many of the supposed converts who are only converted to self-conceit and other delusions, and not to real faith in Jesus Christ.

I charge you, by the living God, every one of you, not to trust to mere excitement or fancy as a ground of salvation. You must be made new creatures in Christ Jesus, your very nature must be changed, the whole bent, and current, and tenor of your life must be altered, and that, not by human arguments and persuasions, but by the Holy Spirit’s power, or else into God’s kingdom you cannot come.

All the praying parents, and praying teachers, and praying ministers and revivalists in the world cannot save a single soul. It must be born again, and when it is born again, they do not work the miracle, God may bless their teaching, but the Holy Spirit must have all the praise for it, for He alone works this wondrous change.

Let me also say to you that *there is nothing in the world that can stand in the stead of your being born again.*

*“Could your zeal no respite know,
Could your tears for ever flow,”*

this text would still remain true, “Ye must be born again.” There it stands in front of the gate of heaven, and to every one of you the question is put, “Can you produce the evidences and tokens of the new birth?” If you can, you may enter, but if you cannot, you can in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.

This necessity is most pressing upon you all. I feel as if I could stand over some of you, and weep as I say to you, “Ye must be born again.” I have told you again and again about judgment to come, but it does not affect you. I have preached to you about Christ’s life, and death, and resurrection, but it does not move you. In a short time you will be upon your dying beds, and no one will be able to help you then unless you are born again. In a little while you will be in eternity, and unless you are born again, you will be driven from the presence of God forever into the outer darkness where there will be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

O sirs, “Ye must be born again,” or ye will be damned! “Ye must be born again,” or ye can never stand among the white-robed throngs that hymn the praises of Jesus. By the love we bear to you, we declare that you must be born again. A mother’s tears, a father’s prayers, a minister’s entreaties, all seem to cry to God, “Lord, our children, our hearers, must be born again. Oh, work this great miracle for Thy love and mercy’s sake!”

I should weary you if I kept on harping upon this string, but I do want to get this truth right into your souls. It does not so much matter whether you remember what I say or what any other preacher says, for we may err, but our text does not err, it is infallible truth, write it up in capital letters, “YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN.”

II. Now secondly, I want very briefly to answer this question, HAVE WE EXPERIENCED THIS NEW BIRTH?

Perhaps somebody says, “Well, I was born again by baptism. I am told that in my baptism, I was made ‘a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.’” Yes, you were told that, but I will ask you one question, *were* you really made all that by your so-called baptism?

I was sprinkled when I was a child, but I know that I was not thereby made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. I know that nothing of the kind took place in me, but that, as soon as I could, I went into sin, and continued in it. I was not born again, I am sure, till I

was about fifteen years of age, when the Lord brought salvation so my soul through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and so I was enabled so trust in Jesus as my Savior.

You say that your prayer book teaches you that you were born again in baptism, but again I ask you, “Were you?” Have you lived like one who has been born again? Have you loved divine things? Have you really been a child of God? Have you really hated sin, and put your trust in Christ? If you have, I am not going to deny facts, but when I see myriads of persons, who were said to have been born again in baptism, turn out as bad as drunkards, and swearers, and adulterers, and even murderers, as those who have not been sprinkled, I really cannot put any confidence in such “baptism” as that.

The fact is, baptismal regeneration [See sermon #573, Baptismal Regeneration—the sermon which has had the largest circulation of any in the whole of Mr. Spurgeon’s discourses] is a lie, a wicked invention of Popery, without the slightest warrant in the Word of God. Not one has ever been born again in baptism, nor ever can be.

Regeneration, in the Scriptures, is always put side by side with faith, as anybody can see who will read the Scripture without prejudice, seeking to know the truth that is there revealed. There is nothing in so called sacraments upon which a soul can rest for salvation. If you have been baptized, and even if you have been immersed, which is the only true baptism, unless the Spirit of God has regenerated you, “Ye must be born again, born from above.”

Someone asks, “How am I to know whether I have been born again?” Well, *one of the first evidences of regeneration is faith in Jesus Christ*, for wherever there is a sincere trust in Jesus Christ the new birth must have been experienced. This belief was described by Christ as “the work of God.” When He was asked, “What shall we do that we might work the works of God,” He answered, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”

To Nicodemus, Jesus said, “He that believeth on him is not condemned.” To the Jews who sought to kill Him, He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, has everlasting life.” So that faith is the evidence of the possession of that new life which shall last forever, that life which is imparted in regeneration.

Another evidence of the new birth is *repentance*. Sorrow for sin is one of the sure signs of the new nature. The newborn Christian hates the sins he loved before, and continues to hate them, and the longer he lives, the more he mourns that he ever committed them. His loathing of sin grows with his growth in grace, and sin is never so hateful to a man as when he is most fully sanctified. The nearer we get to heaven the more ashamed we shall be of ever having been guilty before God.

Sincere prayer is another sure evidence of regeneration. What was said to Ananias concerning Saul of Tarsus, as a proof that he was “a chosen vessel” unto the Lord? “Behold, he prayeth.” It was not in a prayer meeting that he was praying, but all by himself, and the man who is in the habit of communing with God in secret prayer is a living man, for prayer is the vital breath of the soul. One of the signs that a newborn child is living is a cry, and when a man cries to God out of his very soul, you know that he is a living child of the living God.

You may also know whether you are born again by asking yourself another question—*Do you feel a new life within you which you never had before?* “Well,” says one, “I never experienced any change that I know of, I always was good.” Then I am afraid you have formed a wrong estimate of yourself, and that you never were what you call “good.” “Well,” says the self-righteous man, “I really do not think there was any necessity for any such change as you have been speaking of.” Ah! but it is not a question of what you think, what saith the text? “Ye *must* be born again.”

“But,” say others, “we had godly parents, we had an excellent example set before us. We were taken, when we were little children, to hear the Word, and we have been regular attendants upon the ministry all our days.” All that does not alter the fact, “Ye must be born again,” or else all these privileges will only increase your responsibility. Jesus still says to you, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

“Repent, and be baptized, every one of you,” was the answer of the apostle Peter to those who asked what they must do to be saved. Repentance is necessary in every case, there must be this radical change

which shall make you loathe what you once loved, and love what you once loathed. I dare not diminish one jot or tittle of the absolute necessity of the case, for I have to answer at the judgment bar of God for what I tell you. If I should flatter you into some vain hope for which there is no solid foundation, you might at the last turn round upon me and say, "You deceived us into the belief that we were saved when we were not." I will not do that, and therefore I say to you "Ye must be born again."

Do you, then, feel this new life within you? Have you desires that you never used to have? Have you hopes you never had before? Have you fears you never had before? In fact, have you got into a new world where old things have passed away, and all things have become new? Do you feel like that woman who said, "Either the world is altogether changed, or else I am"?

And is this the result of the change that has taken place in you, now you love God, now you seek to please Him, now spiritual things are realities to you, now the blood of Jesus is your only trust, now you desire to be made holy, even as God is holy? If there is such a new life as that in you, however feeble it may be, though it is only like the life of a newborn child, you are born again, and you may rejoice in that blessed fact.

"Ah!" somebody says, "I fear that this kind of preaching will be very discouraging to a great many people." Well, how will it discourage them? "It will discourage them from trying to save themselves." That is the very thing that I want to do. I would like not only to discourage them from attempting that impossible task, but to cast them into despair concerning it. When a man utterly despairs of being able to save himself, it is then that he cries to God to save him, so I believe that we cannot do a man a better turn than to discourage him from ever resting upon anything that he can do towards saving himself.

"Well," says another, "but it is apt to make sinners look within." Is it? Have I ever said a word about sinners looking within? I have not said that you are to make yourselves to be born again, but I have said that "ye must be born again" by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost. Surely that does not make sinners look within. It makes them look above to Someone infinitely higher than themselves.

The fact is, dear friends, that the preaching of the necessity of the new birth must be continued because it is true. It is in the Word of God, and as it is there, it is there for a definite purpose, and it ought not to be put into the background, or must not be so treated.

I believe that wherever there is the work of grace in the soul, preaching the necessity of the new birth deepens that work. I know that a great many profess to come to Christ, and I hope that they really do come to Him, although they have never felt what some of us experienced when we were under conviction of sin. Well, if they have come to Christ, it is all right, and I am glad, but I am still a believer in the old-fashioned type of conversion, and I do not think there are many new births without pangs, or that many souls come to Christ without alarms of conscience, and much sorrow of heart on account of sin.

When I was converted, sinners used to come to Christ in this way. They looked by faith at Him whom they had pierced by their sins, and mourned for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. I think I have seldom seen a conversion turn out well that had not the foundations of it laid in some measure of abhorrence of sin, and loathing of self, and utter despair of any salvation except by the sovereign grace of God.

Remember, brethren, that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and nothing better, and that "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away," it is only "the word of the LORD" and the work of the Lord that shall endure forever. Therefore I pray that if there is any work in you at all, it may be God's work, and not my work, or the work of any earnest man striving to stir you up, but the real work of God the Holy Ghost from first to last.

If I were in a state of anxiety about my soul, and I heard such a sermon as this, it would make me feel, "Oh, how dependent I am upon the Spirit of God!" It would compel me to breathe from my inmost soul this prayer, "O Lord, save me!" I think that it would drive me, in despair of doing anything to save myself, to cast myself into the Savior's arms, that He might give me of that Spirit by which I should be

born again. And remember that the moment a sinner does that, he is born again. As soon as ever he casts himself upon Christ, he has passed from death unto life, and the miracle of regeneration has been wrought in him.

I think, dear friends, that when we solemnly preach the necessity of regeneration, it has the good effect of overthrowing all that which is false in men, and most if not all of that which comes of humanity is false. You may grow mushrooms out of almost any filthiness you choose to put down, but the Rose of Sharon needs a different soil from that, you can easily grow men and women who say they are Christians, and who are very earnest for a month or two, and then go back to the world again. It is the Holy Ghost alone who creates that life which is everlasting.

In the case of those who are mere professors, a very little reproof has the effect of making them go away because they are offended, but it is not so with the true possessors of grace. That which is of our heavenly Father's planting will never be rooted up, but it will endure all tests that may so applied to it. I know that when I went to see the minister about making a profession of my faith in Christ, I hoped that he would test me, and try me, and probe me, for I wanted him to find me out if I was a hypocrite or self-deceived, and I think that every genuine convert feels very much as I did.

We do not want to have any superficial work, we do not want the work to be slurred, we want it to be done thoroughly so that it will last throughout eternity. I do not want to have any peace except it is real peace through the precious blood of Jesus. To cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace, is a terrible thing, which will be sure to end in overwhelming despair, or else in fatal presumption which is worse still.

I am sure that the preaching of the necessity of regeneration is one of the most effectual ways to injure Satan's cause, for nothing else will avail for the conversion of a big sinner, a ringleader in the devil's army. John Bunyan once said a very strange thing. He said that he had great hopes concerning the generation following his own, because the young people in his time were so very wicked. He thought that if they were saved—and he expected that many of them would be—such great sinners as they had been would make great saints. He knew what he had himself been, and what the grace of God had made of him, and that gave him hopes for others.

It was an odd way of putting it, but he was right, and if the Lord should take some big sinner here, and transform him into a saint, what a grand alteration it would make in his home! Perhaps it would affect a whole parish.

I have known some leaders in sin whose conversion has really had a wonderful influence over the whole countryside where they lived, those who used to be drinking and sporting with them have said to one another, "Have you heard what has come to old Tom?" "No, what's up with him?" "Why, he says that he has been converted! I met him the other day and I said to him, 'What's the latest news?' and he said to me, 'The best news I have ever heard is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief.' I can't make out what has happened to him!" Then everybody says, "There is something in that religion which has laid hold of him."

I remember well, in my first pastorate, the time when the biggest drunk in Waterbeach joined the church. His conversion crowded the place at once, people said, "Well, if that young man's ministry has been a blessing to such an old sinner as that, there is something in it, you may depend upon it," and they came out of curiosity to hear the Word.

The best gamekeepers are those who used to be poachers, and the best preachers to great sinners are those who were once just such as they themselves are. They know the ins and outs of a sinner's heart, and they can talk from experience instead of from theory. When a man has been in the fire, and has the smell of it still upon him, he is the one to warn others not to meddle with fire, and by means of such sinners saved by grace, God shakes Satan's kingdom to its very center, and translates sinners from it into the kingdom of His dear Son. Such conversions as these, like all true conversions, can only be wrought by the Holy Spirit.

I pray you all to adore the Holy Spirit, think of Him ever with the profoundest reverence. Christian men and women, who have been quickened by His power, invoke His might to rest upon you whenever you go about God's work, for without Him you can do nothing. Pray in the Holy Ghost, preach in the Holy Ghost, and do not believe in the conversion of a single soul apart from the Spirit of God.

Go and preach, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," as fully and as freely as you can, but remember that your preaching cannot, of itself, raise one soul out of its lost estate. This will be your comfort, that the Spirit of God will work with you and through you if you rely upon Him, and depend wholly upon Him.

I tell you, sinners, all of you without exception, that if you will come to Jesus Christ, and simply trust Him, you shall have salvation, and shall have it at once, but my reliance upon any result of my proclamation of the Gospel is not based upon my hope that you will be so well disposed as to come, or upon my confidence that my way of putting the truth will lead you to come to Christ. No, I have not a shadow of reliance, either upon you or upon myself, but I do have this confidence, that if I faithfully preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, He will draw sinners unto Himself, and I believe that He will save some out of this congregation, though I know not who they may be.

You are like a heap of steel filings and ashes before me, it is no business of mine to separate you. My business is to thrust in the magnet, and that will do it. You who will accept Christ as your Savior may have Him, you who will not accept Him must perish in your sin, but if you do accept Christ, it is because the Spirit of God has led you so to do, and has given you the new birth which enables you to do it. If you reject Him, on your own heads be your blood forever.

This is a solemn matter, I hope that what I have said will make you think that it is so, and that ere you go to your beds, you will shake off the idea that this is a very small matter to be attended to whenever you like, and to be trifled with as long as you please, but that, instead thereof, you will each one say, "O God, I see that Thou alone can save me! Thou canst crush me, or Thou canst save me. I have no claim upon Thee. If Thou dost destroy me, Thou wilt be just, yet save me, Lord, for Thy dear Son's sake!" Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.